

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 115

By Cooper

A RESOLUTION to urge Governor Haslam to study sentencing and commutation of nonviolent offenders.

WHEREAS, as of November 2016, President Obama has granted 944 commutations—more commutations than the previous ten presidents combined with more than one-third of the President’s commutation recipients, or 324 individuals, serving a life sentence; and

WHEREAS, these individuals are sons, daughters, parents, and in many cases, grandparents, who have taken steps toward rehabilitation and who have earned their second chance; and

WHEREAS, these individuals received unduly harsh sentences under outdated and unjust laws for committing largely nonviolent drug crimes; and

WHEREAS, the individualized nature of this relief highlights the societal need for bipartisan criminal justice reform legislation, including reforms that address excessive mandatory minimum sentences; and

WHEREAS, we urge Governor Haslam to use his powers authorized under Article III, Section 6 of the Tennessee Constitution and give thoughtful consideration to commuting the sentences of numerous Tennesseans who are serving life sentences in prison for nonviolent felony crimes on an individual basis; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that Governor Haslam, in consultation with the district attorneys general conference, the district public defender conference, the board of parole, and the administrative office of the courts, is urged to conduct a comprehensive study of the number of state prisoners held for nonviolent felony cases with long-term sentences, the feasibility of commuting such

sentences, and current mandatory sentencing guidelines to remove any outdated sentencing or unduly harsh sentencing in the criminal laws. Governor Haslam shall use the study to prepare a written report informing the public of the number of sentences with the potential to be commuted, the number of commuted sentences for offenders serving life sentences, and current sentencing guidelines or laws that may need to be amended or repealed. Governor Haslam and the interested stakeholders shall submit the written report to the members of the State Government and Criminal Justice committees of the House of Representatives and the Judiciary and the State and Local Government committees of the Senate no later than August 1, 2018.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the Office of the Governor, the district attorneys general conference, the district public defender conference, the board of parole, and the administrative office of the courts.